DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 098 641 CS 500 888

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TITLE Mexican American Self-Referents and Linguistic Attitudes.
PUB DATE Apr 74
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the International Communication Association (New Orleans, Louisiana, April 17-20, 1974)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Class Attitudes; Cultural Awareness; *Cultural Factors; Ethnic Groups; Identification; *Language Role; *Mexican Americans; *Self Concept; Social Influences; *Spanish; Spanish Speaking

ABSTRACT

In order to determine whether differences in choice of ethnic self-referent by Mexican-Americans reflect differences in ethnic identity and attitudes toward their culture, questionnaires were distributed among Mexican-Americans living in San Antonio. The measurable cultural attitude was that toward language, since to the Mexican-American Spanish is the primary symbol of loyalty. The questionnaire contained 14 attitudinal statements about language (Spanish, English, and Tex-Mex--a regional Spanish dialect), demographic information, and a list of five self-referents. Analysis of the 160 completed surveys revealed that 13 subjects identified themselves as "Mexicano," 68 as "Mexican-American," 18 as "Chicano," 12 as "Latin," and 39 as "American of Mexican descent." There were significant differences in attitudes among the various self-referent groups, although central among the common features was a loyalty to Spanish as part of the ethnic culture. A list of references, a table listing 14 linguistic attitude statements, and a table of data analysis conclude this paper. (JM)

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Mexican American Self-Referents

and

Linguistic Attitudes

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A Paper presented at the International Communication Association annual meeting, New Orleans, Louisiana, April 19, 1974.

CS 500 888

Mexican American Linguistic Attitudes and Self-Referents

Mexican Americans from the viewpoints of class, culture, race, education and nativity appear to be a very heterogeneous ethnic group. In fact, some argue that, essentially, there is no Mexican American community as such, because the group is fragmentized by social class, regional, and rural-urban differences.[1]

This lack of unity is reflected in the variety of labels which have been used to identify individuals within this group. Just as there is no consensus among Mexican Americans as to their self-image, there is no consensus about what they would like to be called. Julian Nava has said, "Nothing will arouse such heated debate among Mexicans at any level, as the very use of a term to describe them."[2]

A newspaper in Denver describing itself as "The Political Voice of the Hispanic Community" is quoted as having used all of the following descriptors in referring to Mexican Americans: "Hispanic people," "Mexican-Americans," "Spanish-American community," "Spanish-surnamed voters," "Spanish-named people," and "Spanish-speaking people."[3] A wide variety of other labels, from "Mexicano" and "Latin-American" to "Hispano" and "Chicano" have been used to refer to the same group of people. This reflects the undertainty and confusion of choice of labels for the Mexican American.

This diversity of ethnic self-referents employed by Mexican Americans reveals that ethnic identity varies greatly among members of the minority. Leo Grebler has said that individual self-designation "reflects the wide variety of considerations that plague the definition of ethnic identity."[4]

Self-referents might be chosen with various aspects in mind: cultural, political, social, or ideological. Both Grebler and Simmen list

socioeconomic level, age, and location as variants which affect self-referents among Mexican Americans. Another possible factor which affects label choice might be time, as some labels shift in ideology and change rapidly. For example, the term "Chicano," which used to be employed by Mexican Americans as an uncomplimentary term of address is now chosen proudly by some Mexican Americans as an ethnic self-referent.[5]

Another factor which might affect self-referent choice is the linguistic environment in which the label is stated. For example, in the Southwest the term "Mexican" as used by Anglos has so often carried derogatory meanings that other labels, such as "Latin-American" have been used in its place; yet the Spanish word "Mexicano" when used by the Spanish-speaking is "perfectly acceptable to most of the population."[6]

At least two studies of Mexican American self-referents have been conducted in recent years. In 1965-66, Leo Grebler, et. al. conducted a survey comparing Spanish and English name preference in the Los Angeles and San Antonio areas. Grebler found that the English name preference varied significantly in the two areas. In Los Angeles, the English name preferred by the majority was "Mexican," while in San Antonio the majority preferred the label "Latin-American." The Spanish name preferred in the Los Angeles areawas "Mexicano." In San Antonio the choice varied according to income class; the medium income class preferred "Latino," while the low income class preferred "Mexicano."[7]

Another survey, reported by Julian Samora was based on a series of interviews conducted in 1961-62 with 89 Mexican American men in the Los Angeles area. All were active in leading ethnic organizations and in community affairs. At the end of an interview, the men were asked (1) the name they

preferred to be called by people who are also of Mexican descent, and (2) what they prefer to be called by people who are not of Mexican descent.

While the name "Mexican American" was preferred more than any other label in response to both questions, it is interesting to note that while only about 11% chose "American" as the preferred label when being addressed by other Mexican Americans, about 28% chose "American" as the preferred label when being addressed by people who are not of Mexican descent.[8] These findings reveal that social context might also be a variant for determining self-referent choice.

This study was conducted in order to determine whether differences in choice of ethnic self-referent did, indeed, reflect differences in ethnic identity and attitudes toward the Mexican American culture. It was decided that a measurable cultural attitude would be that toward language, since Spanish and dialects of Spanish are integral factors of Mexican American culture. In fact, among Mexican Americans, Spanish is the primary symbol of loyalty to La Raza, the Mexican American people.[9]

Often, Mexican Americans who speak little or no Spanish are referred to by other Mexican Americans as "agringados" or "vendidos," (Mexican Americans who act like Anglos or who have "sold out" to the Anglo.),[10]

On the other hand, in some areas, speaking English at home or in the barrio may be taken as a sign of ethnic disloyalty. And in yet other instances, some Mexican Americans are ridiculed by speakers of "standard" Spanish for speaking a regional dialect of Spanish or using "pochismos," (neologisms produced by language interference).[11]

Thus, the symbolic meanings of language vary widely for Mexican Americans. While some are ridiculed for not speaking Spanish, others are

ridiculed for speaking non-standard dialects of Spanish and still others are ridiculed for not speaking English, or for speaking English with a Mexican accent.[12] Each of these attitudes divided the group's loyalty to both language and culture.

Method

Fourteen attitudinal statements about Spanish, English, and Tex-Mex (a regional dialect of Spanish) were drawn up to form part of a questionnaire, in both English and Spanish. Statements such as, "Tex-Mex should be studied and respected as a dialect," were placed on a four-point scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree, with no neutral position left available. The statements are displayed in Table 1.

The questionnaire also called for demographic information such as age, sex, occupation and spouse's occupation. Each was also asked to indicate which of five self-referents he would be most likely to choose for himself and which he would be least likely to choose for self-designation. The five self-referents included in the study were: "Mexicano," "Latin," "Chicano," "Mexican American," and "American of Mexican descent."

A total of 160 surveys were completed. Subjects for the study were people who sat in a doctor's waiting room on the Westside of San Antonio, a predominately Mexican American portion of the city. Other respondents were surveyed at a Mexican Methodist church in San Antonio.

Results

Analysis of the data revealed that of the 160 respondents, 13 identified themselves as "Mexicano," 68 referred to themselves as "Mexican American,"

18 as "Chicano," 12 as "Latin," and 39 as "American of Mexican descent." There were a number of significant differences in attitudes between the various self-referent groups. Analyses of variance were run for each of the fourteen statements to determine which statements discriminated among the five self-referent groups. The results are displayed in Table 2.

Of the fourteen attitudinal statements, eleven elicited significantly different responses from the self-referent groups. For three of the statements, the respondents tended to answer in the same manner no matter which self-referent group they belonged to. For statement two, "A Mexican American who is not able to speak Spanish has lost his culture," the Mexicano and Latin groups tended to agree slightly, while the other three groups tended to disagree very slightly; but the differences were not significant.

Similarly, for statement six, "It isn't necessary or important to learn Spanish is you live in the United States, since English is the American language," there were no significant differences between the groups. All of the groups tended to disagree with this statement. Apparently, all Mexican Americans seem to still feel some attachment to the Spanish language.

For statement eight, "How a person expresses himself is not important. What does matter is getting the point across," all of the groups tended to agree with the idea that the main objective of speaking should be getting the point across. Obviously, there is some agreement among most Mexican Americans about some linguistic attitudes. Central among the common features seems to be a loyalty to Spanish as part of the ethnic culture.

However, more of the statements elicited differences than similarities among the groups. The attitudinal statements which revealed the significant differences included statement thirteen, which dealt with attitudes toward

Tex-Mex, a dialect of Spanish: "It's degrading to speak Tex-Mex." Latin responses agreed slightly with this statement and differed significantly from all other groups except Mexicano. In contrast, Chicano responses were strongly in disagreement with the statement. Chicano responses differed significantly with all groups except for American of Mexican descent. Mexicano and American of Mexican descent responses also differed significantly from each other.

Another statement which also revealed significantly different responses was one which dealt with correctness of language use, statement ten: "Using slang or non-standard expressions in English or Spanish reveals that a person is not well-educated." The Latin responses were in agreement with this statement. Three groups disagreed with the statement: American of Mexican descent, Mexican American, and Chicano. Mexicano and Latin responses did not differ significantly from each other.

Two statements dealing with the relation of Spanish to culture revealed the next significantly different results. Statement five reads: "A Mexican American who claims he can't speak Spanish does so because he's ashamed to admit he's Mexican." This statement elicited agreement from the Mexicano, which differed significantly with all other groups. The Chicano disagreed with the statement most strongly of the five groups.

Statement seven, "A Mexican American who speaks only in English when his friends speak to him in Spanish is denying his culture," elicited from the Mexicano group responses which were in agreement and differed significantly from all other groups. The next closest group was Latin, differing significantly with the American of Mexican descent who disagreed most strongly.

Two statements dealing with the importance of language learning revealed

some significant differences. Statement four reads: "It's important that a Mexican American speak good English so that he may take an active part in the American society." Most of the groups tended to agree with this statement except the Chicano, whose mean response differed significantly with all of the other groups.

Statement nine, "You have to be able to speak English as well as Anglos in order to compete with them in this society," was agreed to by all of the groups, except the Chicano. Chicano responses differed significantly from all of the other groups.

Two other statements which also revealed significant differences dealt with attitudes toward Tex-Mex. Statement eleven, "Tex-Mex should be respected and studied as a dialect," was the only statement the Chicano agreed on more strongly than any other group. The Chicano response differed significantly from two other groups, Mexican American and American of Mexican descent. The American of Mexican descent group also differed significantly from Mexicano and Latin, who tended to agree slightly with the statement.

Statement one, which dealt with correctness of language use, revealed some significant differences in attitudes among three pairs of the groups. It stated: "If a person is going to speak any language, he should speak only the correct form of that language." The Mexicano tended to agree most with this statement, while the Chicano disagreed most. The Chicano response differed significantly with each of the other groups except Mexican American, while the Mexicano response differed significantly only with the Chicano response.

Statement three, which dealt with attitudes toward Tex-Mex, was the final statement to reveal significant differences. Two pairs of groups

contrasted significantly on the statement, "A person who speaks Tex-Mex is probably not well-educated." The Latin and Mexicano agreed most with this statement and differed significantly only from the Chicano response, which was the most negative of the group responses for this particular statement.

Discussion

An analysis of the responses revealed that the person who refers to himself as Mexicano felt that speaking Spanish is an integral part of being Mexican. Denying knowledge of Spanish is betraying one's culture. This attitude might arise if the Mexicano uses Spanish more than English in his social interaction, and perhaps feels that Mexican Americans who employ English for this purpose are "trying to be Anglos," by not speaking Spanish.

The Mexican American self-referent group felt generally that it's important to learn English if he takes part in an English-speaking society. He appears to be keenly aware of his competition with Anglos in this society. Also, the Mexican American does not look down on Mexican Americans who can't speak Spanish or on Mexican Americans who speak Tex-Mex. More than likely, this group is more assimilated into the Anglo culture with regard to their views toward English and cannot feel scornful toward Mexican Americans who no longer speak Spanish, possibly because many of them no longer speak Spanish themselves or have friends who don't.

The Chicano self-referent group gave more negative responses than any other group on eight of the statements where significant differences were found. For three of the statements, the Chicano differed significantly from all of the other self-referent groups. It appears that the Chicano group is more extreme in its disagreement with statements than any other group.

The Chicano seems to resent the idea that Mexican Americans have to "play the game" of competing in society according to Anglo rules, by speaking English as well as Anglos. The Chicano's most extreme answers, however, dealt with Tex-Mex. Apparently, the Chicano felt that Tex-Mex should be a matter of pride for the Mexican American, and that it should not be something that a Mexican American should be made to feel ashamed about.

Analysis of the data revealed that correctness of language use appears to be the main concern of the Latin self-referent group. Tex-Mex is non-standard and therefore should be avoided. Also, the Latin group does not scorn the Mexican American who can't speak Spanish as does the Mexicano, perhaps because the Latin is more assimilated into the Anglo culture than the Mexicano.

Also, the data reveal that the responses of the American of Mexican descent are very similar to those of the Mexican American group. The American of Mexican descent seems to feel that it is important to learn English because of the society Mexican Americans live in. He does not condemn a Mexican American for not speaking Spanish or for speaking Tex-Mex. However, he does not feel that Tex-Mex merits being studies as a dialect, as does the Chicano.

There appears to be various Mexican American "cultural states of mind" which might be detected by self-referents in some cases, especially in the case of the Mexicano and Chicano groups. Other labels, such as Mexican American and American of Mexican descent, are less likely to indicate which slant attitudes will take. The results emphasize the importance of linguistic attitudes in the constellation of variables which reflect the perception of self.

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Table 1

LINGUISTIC ATTITUDE STATEMENTS

1. If a person is going to speak any language, he should speak only the correct form of that language.

2. A Mexican-American who is not able to speak Spanish has lost his culture.

3. A person who speaks Tex-Mex is probably not well educated.

4. It's important that a Mexican-American speak good English so that he may take an active part in the American society.

5. A Mexican-American who claims he can't speak Spanish does so because he's ashamed to admit he's Mexican.

6. It isn't necessary or important to learn Spanish if you live in the United States since English is the American language.

7. A Mexican-American who speaks only in English when his friends speak to him in Spanish is denying his culture.

8. How a person expresses himself is not important. What does matter is getting the point across.

9. You have to be able to speak English as well as Anglos in order to compete with them in this society.

10. Using slang or non-standard expressions in either English or Spanish reveals that a person is not well educated.

11. Tex-Mex should be respected and studied as a dialect.

12. I feel that Tex-Mex should not be used on T.V. or radio because it isn't a correct language.

13. It's degrading to speak Tex-Mex.

14. It's important that Mexican-American children be taught both English and Spanish in the schools.

Table 2

MEAN RESPONSES BY SELF-REFERENT GROUPS

TO ATTITUDINAL STATEMETNS

Statement	Mexican	Mexican American	Chicano	Latin American	American of Mex. Descent	F-Ratio	Probability
1	1.7692_{a}*	2.2879_{ab}	2.7778_{b}	1.7778_{a}	1.9231_{a}	4.297	$p<.01$
2	2.3846	2.7206	2.7778	2.1818	2.6923	1.345	n.s.
3	2.3077_{a}	2.7692_{ab}	3.0556_{b}	2.3000_{a}	2.7692_{ab}	2.472	$p<.05$
4	1.5385_{a}	1.9104_{a}	2.6667_{b}	1.9091_{a}	1.8974_{a}	4.032	$p<.01$
5	1.8462_{b}	2.8657_{ac}	3.1111_{c}	2.5000_{a}	2.9231_{ac}	5.642	$p<.01$
6	3.3077	3.0000	3.2778	2.6364	2.8718	1.632	n.s.
7	1.7692_{b}	2.7231_{ac}	2.7222_{ac}	2.2727_{a}	2.8718_{c}	6.211	$p<.01$
8	2.0000	2.3433	2.2778	2.2727	2.4103	.597	n.s.
9	2.0000_{a}	2.3881_{a}	2.9444_{b}	1.9091_{a}	2.2432_{a}	3.509	$p<.01$
10	2.1538_{bc}	2.7385_{a}	3.1250_{a}	2.1000_{b}	2.7368_{a}	4.704	$p<.01$
11	2.1538_{ab}	2.5156_{bc}	1.7500_{a}	2.1818_{ab}	2.7027_{c}	5.345	$p<.01$
12	2.1538_{a}	2.5385_{a}	3.3750_{b}	2.1818_{a}	1.0789_{a}	7.225	$p<.01$
13	2.5385_{ab}	2.8571_{bc}	3.3889_{d}	2.3636_{a}	3.0270_{cd}	5.226	$p<.01$
14	1.3077	1.7538	1.3333	1.4545	1.6579	2.402	n.s.

*Means with a common subscript are not significantly different ($p<.05$).